THE LITTLE GREEN GATE.

CHAPTER I.

THE MERFOLK.

PAUL and Ellie stole softly out of bed, crept gently downstairs, and into the garden, and then, quiet as two little mice, slipped down between the sand banks.

It is easy to go softly on sand; and when the moon is shining at her fullest, and all around you is wonderfully still, then you do, of course, steal along without making any noise.

Paul was only one year older than Ellie, but Ellie was as tall as her brother; and, as they found their way to the shore, their shadows glided along behind them, measuring the same height, so that the brownies in the gorse thought that they were twins.

When they put their feet on the sand, Ellie [illegible] we could only just see one *now*, we [illegible]w."

[illegible] and then she would help us [illegible] get [illegible]other's birthday."

[illegible] we could ask her about their hair, and tails, and all the other things we want to know."

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They walked slowly, hand in hand, over the firm, damp sand. The waves made big roars, when they broke; and in between there was only the quieter sound of the water rushing back.

The children stood and watched eagerly; and though they were watching very hard, and though they were leaning forward, trying not to miss anything that should come, they both gave a jump of surprise, when, all at once, *there*, just in front of them, they saw what they were so much hoping to see.

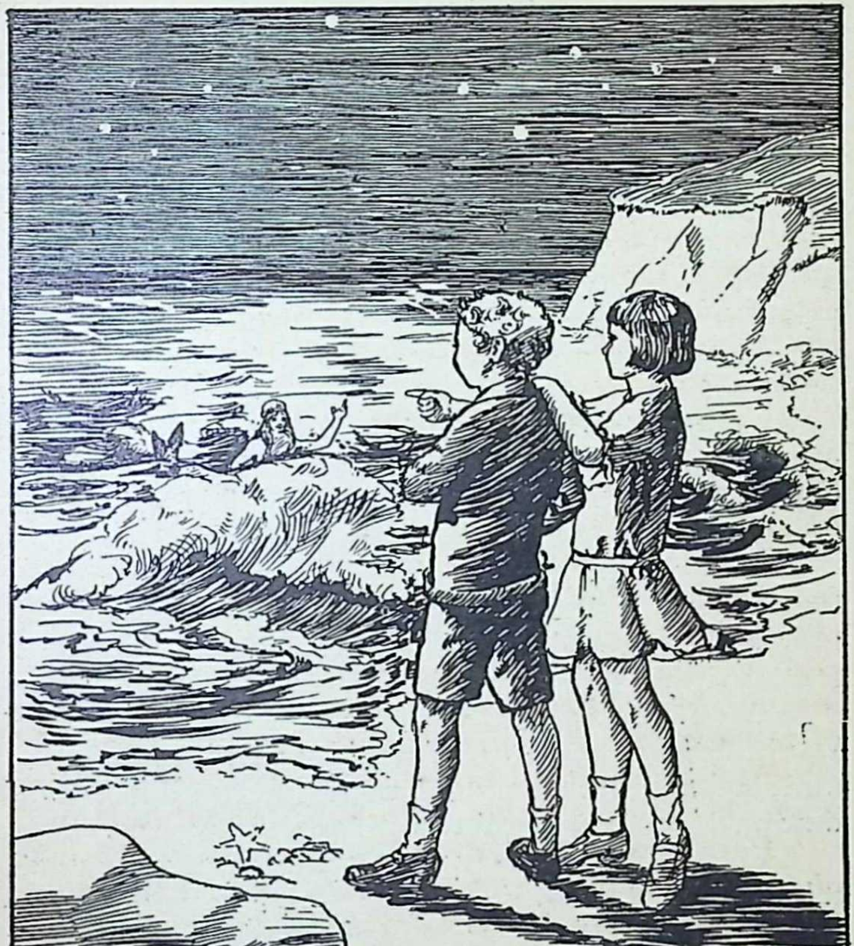
There, peeping at them with big blue-grey eyes—*there*, beckoning to them with a slim white hand—*there*, smiling with a queer elfish little twinkle, was a mermaid!

Paul and Ellie ran quickly down, nearer to the waves. The moon shone brightly. But, however bright she is, moonlight is not like sunlight; and as they ran forward, they thought that the mermaid had gone away. They went to the edge of the water and looked about for her.

Ah! there she was, on the crest of a falling wave, beckoning again with her little white hand.

Paul looked down at his clothes, for he had on a new jersey and knickers; but Ellie, who, as a rule, thought more of such things than he did, now dashed straight into the water, pulling him by the hand.

"Come *on*," she said impatiently. "We shall lose her, if we are not quick."



"Ah! there she was, beckoning again."—*Page* 2.

"But, Ellie, can we go like this?" Paul began. "Shan't we spoil ——"

Ellie would not listen; she dragged him on until he found himself looking into the eyes of the mermaid. Then he forgot about his clothes, and everything else but the mermaid, and simply went deeper and deeper into the water.

Deeper and deeper! And still the mermaid beckoned; she was always just a little way in front of them, and they were always just beyond reach of her.

At length, however, they found that she was within touch. She held out her hands, saying, "Ah! here you are. Come along! I will take you to Merland."

Paul said, "We'd love to go; but can we breathe under water?" For answer, she only looked straight into his eyes, and he felt how foolish it was to ask such a thing.

Then all at once, with Ellie on one side, and Paul on the other, the mermaid dived into a wave; and the children found themselves going down, down, down, through the dim green water.

The cool, slippery, dark water, how lovely it felt! Paul and Ellie had never guessed before how lovely it *could* feel; but now they knew what dry and stuffy creatures they had been, before they came into it. Ellie peeped round to see if she had got a tail, and Paul tried to touch the fishes as they glided by.

Down, down, down, breathing easily, diving gracefully, loving the coolness, and everything that was happening to them—down, down, down they went, until at last they landed, with soft little thuds, at the bottom of the sea.

"There!" said the mermaid. "And how did you like *that*?"

"Oh! it was simply lovely," the children answered; and Paul looked slyly down and pinched his new jersey, finding that it was not spoiled a bit, but Ellie only gazed round-eyed at the mermaid. From a small pearl and seaweed bag which hung round her waist, Ellie saw her take out a lovely little comb made of coral, and draw it with long, slow sweeps through her thick dark hair.

"I knew mermaids had tails, and I knew that they often combed their hair," she said. "But that is nearly all I do know about them, except what I make up for myself."

"Well! now you shall learn *everything* about them," her new friend answered. "My name is Shella; I know yours already, because I am a fairy. *I* want to know a lot of things about you too; so I'll show you my friends, and where we live, and then you shall tell me about what *you* do, and how you live. I belong to the merfolk of the Shell Palace; and a little way from us there are a great many more, who live in the Blue Caves. Come along."

She gave a hand to each of them, and they glided, slowly and smoothly, through the water.

A wonderful palace of shells rose up in front of them; and they passed through an opening, to find it full of beauty inside. It was lined with mother-of-pearl; the furniture was made of coral and pretty shells; and gliding about, in a huge hall, were merfolk of every description.

There were maidens with blue eyes and long hair, boys with merry twinkling smiles, wise old mermen with kindly faces, and mother merladies with chubby babies in their arms.

And oh! their tails, their beautiful glittering tails, big, and little, and middle-sized! Paul and Ellie thought that never in their lives had they seen anything so pretty as these many-coloured swishing tails; and at the same time the merfolk gazed with just as much interest at the children's legs.

"Show us how you walk," they said; and at once there was the greatest fun in the Shell Palace.

Ellie and Paul found that to walk on the bottom of the sea was not at all the same as walking on dry land; for they had to go much more slowly, and they felt as if they were making a poor show. But the merfolk seemed to think that to walk at all was very clever, and began at once to try to copy them. The sights were so funny, and every one laughed so much, that

soon the whole party was sitting down, quite tired out.

"It is too bad," said one. "You *can* learn to swim with your legs, but we simply can *not* walk on our tails."

"Never mind; let them tell us a story," said another, "a real Dryland story, and then we will tell them a real Merland one."

Everybody gathered eagerly around, while Paul looked at Ellie, and Ellie looked at Paul.

"Who's going to tell it?" they asked each other; and Paul looked so shy and awkward that Ellie knew he would be no good. So, before she had time to feel bashful, she quickly began the story of Cinderella.

When she had once started, it became easy; the eager merfolk were so pleased and interested that she forgot all about herself, and thought only of the story. She made Cinderella such a lonely, unhappy little dear, that they all began to sigh and wring their hands; and then she made her such a wonderful, good, happy princess, that they all laughed and swished their tails for joy.

When the story ended, a great buzz of talk began, and it was quite a little time before Ellie and Paul could make themselves heard.

"Now *we* want a merfolk story," they kept on saying. "Who's going to tell us a tale now?"

At last they were answered.

"Ah! yes, they must have a story now," someone said. "Nepin, Nepin, tell them a story!"

An old white-haired merman came forward; and, sitting down in front of the crowd, he began to tell a story.

The children soon forgot that they had slipped out of bed without telling their mother. They forgot that they had crossed the beach, when the moon was shining. They forgot that they had seen a mermaid, and that she had dived with them to the bottom of the sea. They forgot that they were sitting there now, listening to an old merman.

Yes, they forgot everything in the world, except old Nepin's wonderful story, every word of which they followed eagerly.

No one spoke, no one moved, while he was telling it; and it was only when he ended, "And then the oysters gave all their biggest pearls to the Princess," that Ellie remembered something and called out eagerly,

"Oh! that reminds me. Please *could* you tell us where we can find some pearls to make a necklace for Mother's birthday?"

Shella jumped up and said, "I'll take you to the oyster bed, if you like. If they're feeling very good-tempered, they may give you some to take home for your mother."

"Oh, please *do*," Ellie said. "You see it's her birthday next Wednesday; and we would

love to give her a real pearl necklace, wouldn't we, Paul?"

"Yes, but how are we to make the holes so as to thread them?" her brother asked.

"Oh, that's just like you," Ellie answered. "You *always* see difficulties; let's get the pearls first."

"If we find the oysters in a good mood," Shella remarked, "we'll get the holes made all right. Old Nepin will do it; every one goes to him at his little workshop, and he does them beautifully."

"And can we go now?" Ellie asked.

"Yes, come along!" the mermaid answered; and, taking their hands, she drew them along with her through the water. They did not walk, and they did not swim; but Shella swam, and they just glided by her side as easily as possible.

The children had much to see. Merfolk of all kinds passed by them, also fishes big and little, and great rocks and branches of coral rose up from the ground.

They had quite a long way to go, but it was a happy and wonderful journey. Everything that they saw interested them, and all the time they were seeing fresh sights.

At last they came to a part of the sea bottom which was as flat as a big field. Shella stopped, and they looked around eagerly.

Oysters! Oysters! Oysters!

Everywhere were oysters. The ground was covered with them; but they were all tightly closed, and looked as lifeless as if they were a part of the sea bottom themselves. It was the oyster bed!

Paul and Ellie stood staring at them, and Paul said,

"They look so silly, I'm sure they haven't any pearls."

"Oh! but some of them will have," Shella answered. "Only, you know, oysters are very funny creatures. They're rather deaf, and they're fearfully sleepy; that's why they are always in bed! If they are pleased, and go to sleep pleased, they wake up nice and kind; but if they are cross about anything, and go to sleep in tempers, then they always wake up very angry and disagreeable."

"Well! how did they go to sleep last?" Ellie asked eagerly.

"I don't know," Shella answered. "We'll just have to wake them up, and see. Sometimes they are very sleepy, and will hardly stay awake at all; and sometimes they are quite jolly, at any rate for oysters. But they're always deaf."

She hunted round for a moment or two, and then found a long stick of coral.

"Now I'll wake them," she said; and she swam swiftly about, giving the oysters sharp little taps to wake them up.

Paul and Ellie saw that it would take her a very long time; and so they snatched up sticks of coral as well, and moved about as quickly as they could, giving little raps.

Very slowly the oysters began to wake up. Very slowly they opened their shells, and very slowly they all yawned. Long, wide, gaping yawns! And when they were fully opened, each one showed a large, soft, jelly face. As the children peered eagerly in, they saw, on every face, exactly the same large, fat, good-tempered smile!

"It's all right," Shella exclaimed; and then she began to talk to the smiling oysters.

"Look here, all of you!" she shouted, as they were so deaf. "This is Paul, and this, Ellie; they live on dry land, and they walk on legs. Show them how you do it," she said, more softly, to the children. Then she raised her voice again.

"They want to get some pearls for a necklace for their mother's birthday, and I told them how kind you all were; so they've come to see if you can spare some."

As she said this, all the smiling oysters smiled a little wider; and Paul and Ellie walked about, laughing down at the round, fat, jelly faces which stared up at them. It was an uncommon and comical sight, which they never forgot; but they were not to see it long. Shella had said that oysters were sleepy creatures, and

they soon proved that they were indeed; for, even while the little mermaid was still speaking to them, they began to close up again slowly.

"Wait! Wait!" she shouted as loudly as she could. "Paul and Ellie want some nice pearls for a necklace; I want you to ——"

But it was too late. With fat sleepy smiles the oysters closed up—slowly, but firmly.

"How provoking!" exclaimed Shella, swishing her little tail angrily from side to side. "Now we shall have to wake the silly old things up again." Taking her coral stick, she ran to tap the oysters.

"Oh, but look!" she cried a moment later. "Ellie, Paul, *just* come and look! Why, this one put a pearl out before he closed; the nice old thing!" So saying, she bent and picked up a beautiful round pearl, which she held out to Ellie.

After that they ran round, searching eagerly; and they soon found that all the oysters with pearls had pushed them out of their shells before they went to sleep again. They picked up enough to make a beautiful necklace, and, feeling very pleased, Ellie popped them into her pocket.

"Shall I be waking them up again?" Paul asked.

"Why?" Ellie said.

"So that we can say 'Thank you,' of course."

"I guess they wouldn't thank *you*," Ellie

exclaimed, with a laugh. "He *is* stupid, isn't he, Shella?"

"Well, I don't think we will," the mermaid answered, laughing too. "Would you like to go straight to old Nepin? It will take him some little time to put the holes in, you know."

So they took hold of one another's hands; and then, with one more look at the fast-asleep oysters, they glided away.

CHAPTER II.

THE OLD CONGER.

"May we take the pearls straight to the old man?" Ellie asked. "For I would love to have the holes made in them."

"Yes, I'll take you to him," Shella answered. "It is a long way from here though, and I'm hungry; shall we get something to eat?"

Paul and Ellie looked quickly at one another. Something to eat, at the very bottom of the sea—how strange it sounded! But when they thought about it, they both began to feel hungry.

"How do you get things to eat down here?" Paul asked.

"When I am in the palace, my mother gives them to me," the little mermaid answered. "If we wanted, we could hunt round and find things; but as we are in a hurry now, the quickest way

will be to go to a shop, by the Blue Caves, and buy what we want."

Paul slipped his hand into the pocket of his knickers.

"I've only got twopence," he said.

"What's that?" Shella asked; so Ellie explained, and showed the money.

"Oh, how funny!" she said. "In Merland you don't need money to buy things; you just give anything you like. Now, if Ellie will spare one of her smallest pearls, that will do; and we can get heaps of things, and —— oh, but look, look!"

Suddenly her quiet little voice rose to a scream; and, catching hold of the children's hands, she began to drag them, as quickly as ever she could, through the water.

"Look! look!" she kept calling, turning her head, and watching something which Paul and Ellie could not see; for their eyes were not as used as hers to the dim sea-light.

"What ever is it?" they asked, and she answered, "It's that horrid old conger eel. He's after us. Can't you see him? He's just behind. Come along! Oh, I *do* wish you had tails."

She pulled hard at their hands, and the children tried to get along more quickly by using their free arms, as they did when swimming. That made their pace a little quicker, but not quick enough to please Shella.

"That horrid old conger!" she went on. "I know exactly what he wants. He's such a bad-tempered, slippery old wretch, that all the merchildren hate him; and he simply loves to frighten them. Come on!"

Ellie and Paul made swift strokes with their arms, and helped themselves along as best they could; but when they peeped round the next time, they could see the great head of the conger quite plainly. He was much nearer, and they could see an ugly grin on his big dark face.

"The great stupid!" Paul muttered, and he became very angry. All at once he realized that it was hardly the thing for a big schoolboy, even at the bottom of the sea, to be running away from a fish, with two little girls.

"The great stupid!" he called out loud, this time; and, pulling his hand away from Shella, he turned round to face the fish.

The eel was not expecting this, and went straight on, knocking Paul over, and passing between Ellie and Shella.

"Quick, quick!" Paul cried, jumping up and catching hold of the other two, whom he then pulled to some rocks which were near.

"Go in there," he said, and pushed them through a little opening which led into a small cave. Then he stood in the entrance and squared up to the great eel, which, still with a grin, was coming back to him.

"You tailless little animal," hissed the conger, "what do you mean by it? Come out."

Paul unfastened his scout-knife from its chain, and opened the blade. He slashed off a piece of thick seaweed which grew just by him; for he thought it possible that the eel did not know what a knife could do.

"What's that?" asked the fish, and his grin faded a little.

"It's a knife," Paul answered, holding it out. "It will cut anything. Come here, and let me show you!" With these words, he brandished the sharp blade about in a fearsome manner.

The eel swished his long body and rolled his great head from side to side. The grin of triumph had now quite gone, and he made a savage hissing noise with his mouth.

"Absurd little two-legs!" he muttered; to which Paul said, "Thanks," and put his knife away in his pocket. In another moment the eel had gone!

Paul felt himself to be really brave.

"Come out!" he said grandly, putting his head into the little cave. "I've sent that conger away."

Ellie and Shella admired him immensely, and it was a happy, cheerful little party which set off again for the shop. It was not far away, and the children hurried along, full of curiosity.

"Here we are!" Shella said presently; then

they found themselves at the beginning of the Blue Caves, and went through an opening into the shop.

Ellie had got her pearl ready, and stood looking round eagerly at all the things on the walls. There were necklaces and bracelets, made of coral, of pretty little shells, and of tiny pearls; combs of every kind; bags of seaweed; curious and beautiful hairpins; and many queer-shaped objects which the mermen used as knives. On a flat piece of rock were set out all the eatables.

The mermaid took up three shells which were tightly filled with some pale-brown stuff, well pressed down.

"We want one each of these," she said, and handed two to the children. Then she poked one of her little white fingers into her own, and scooped out the contents, which she popped into her mouth. Paul and Ellie watched her, and then Paul took a little himself.

"It's very nice indeed," he said; so Ellie began to eat too, and it was not long before the shells were empty. They had never tasted anything *quite* like it before; the nearest description they could afterwards find for it, was "potted meat with a lovely shrimpy crab taste."

"What is it made of?" Ellie asked, and Shella told her that all corals were covered with soft little fleshy growths which looked like flowers. If they were gathered, and pressed tightly into

shells, and then left for some time, they were very good to eat.

"It is a bit like the potted meat we have for tea," Paul said. "What else can we have?"

Shella asked the old shopkeeper if he had any sea-cakes, and he brought out a large shell, in which he had some curious little green things like buns.

"I've only just made these," he said in a slow quavery voice; "they're fresher than those on the counter. Really, these are to-morrow's cakes; but as you have brought visitors, I'll sell you these to-day."

"Thank you very much," Shella said; and, turning to the children, she explained, "These are made of a very special kind of seaweed, which is sometimes very hard to find." She handed them round, biting cheerfully into her own. "Ar'n't they good?" she exclaimed.

Paul and Ellie said, "Um —— lovely!" their mouths full of the strange sweet bun.

"They *look* like fish cakes," remarked Paul, when he could say more. "But they taste like nothing we have ever had before."

Paul had wondered at first how he would ever get enough to satisfy his mighty hunger; but both he and Ellie found that under the sea one does not need a great deal to eat. No one seemed to want any more; but as the old shopman was very anxious that they should take

something else for their pearl, they each chose what they liked best—Ellie a comb, Paul a knife, and Shella a bracelet.

"And *now* may we go to old Nepin?" Ellie asked, slipping her hand into her pocket, and wriggling her fingers about amongst the pearls.

So they went past the Blue Caves, which, as Paul and Ellie saw, were very large, and formed of great beautiful rocks. Merfolk of all kinds passed in and out, and, ever so many times, the children had to stop and show their legs. No one seemed surprised that they should be down there, so far away from home; which was what *they* thought remarkable. But the simple fact that they could walk on two legs quite easily, was something almost beyond belief for these merfolk.

Ellie began to fidget a little, and wish that they could go more quickly, but Paul appeared to love showing how he could walk. At last she said crossly,

"You like showing off at the bottom of the sea, just as much as you do at home; you *are* a baby, Paul."

"Oh! am I?" her brother answered indignantly. "I suppose a baby could drive away a great grinning conger eel, couldn't it? Next time one comes, you'd better ——"

Here Shella took hold of their hands, saying, "Come along, you two, and don't be silly. We

really *will* go straight to old Nepin's now; it isn't very far."

They went on, without stopping again, and came, at last, to a little house, made of shells; here the old man kept his shop. He was sitting in the entrance (there were no doors anywhere in Merland, they noticed), and was making a hair ornament from a piece of shell.

"Hallo! little Cinderella," he said to Ellie, after a word or two from the mermaid, "so you want some holes made in your pearls, do you? Come on then;" and he held out his hands for the treasures.

The children found the tiny house a really wonderful place. Old Nepin could drill holes, and shape all sorts of beautiful things with his queer tools. In his shop he had strange little machines which he had made himself from large fish-bones, sticks of coral, sharp blades of shell, and hard pieces of rock and stone.

He began to make holes in the pearls, using a tool like a fine needle; and as the children stood around, watching him, he started to sing in a low, far-away voice:—

"Down at the bottom of the deep-blue sea,
Down in the caves where the merfolk be,
    Old Nepin sits and works;
And, coiled around, on the slippery ground,
Where rocks stand high, and there is no sound,
    The great sea-conger lurks!

Away to the top of the deep-blue sea,
Where the moon shines bright, and the soft sands be,
And home, and Mother, wait!
When your pearls are strung, and my song is sung,
Go across the shore while the day is young,
To the little garden-gate!"

As he sang, the hands of the old man moved as with magic; and by the time that he had sung his song two or three times over, with the children listening spellbound to the strange music of it, the necklace was finished. The pearls were strung on a fine thread, and fastened with a small clasp.

The old man held them out to Ellie, saying, "For Mother"; and as she put out her hand and took them, Ellie thought of her mother; and as she thought of her mother, she thought of home; and as she thought of home, she thought how very far away it was; and as she thought how very far away it was, she knew that she was homesick; and *then* she knew that she could not stay in Merland any longer.

She looked into the kind grey eyes of the old man, and said wistfully, "It is a long time since we crept across the sands in the moon-light;" to which he answered, "The latch on the little gate is unfastened."

"The little gate is green," Ellie added, "but in the moonlight it looked grey."

"When the sun shines, it will be green again," Nepin said.



"The old man held them out to Ellie."—*Page* 21.

"I shall paint it brighter," Paul interrupted loudly, in a voice which sounded strange to his sister; and as Ellie looked at his face, she knew that he too was homesick.

"Now, I think, we ought to go back," she said quietly; and Shella seemed to understand.

"Will you come again to-morrow night?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed," the children answered. "Will you meet us in the waves?"

"Yes, indeed," the little mermaid whispered; and, after that, there was not another word spoken.

Up! Up! Up!

Plop! Paul and Ellie scrambled to their feet on the moonlit shore.

They looked eagerly into the waves; but now they saw only white spray and greenness. However, Ellie put her hand into her pocket, and felt the necklace lying safely there. Then they crept softly across the sand to the little green gate!

CHAPTER III.

A PARTY.

As Paul and Ellie went down through the sea, the next night, they wondered what their adventures would be this time.

Shella had not said much, since they met; but they thought that she looked as if she had a secret.

Paul had remembered to bring his knife, and had also some string and a little tin box. He hoped to take home a sea-cake for Mother.

Ellie had popped a little locket and some coloured beads into her pocket, for Shella.

As they went down once more through the cool, green water, they wondered how ever they had managed to lie comfortably in bed, when it was possible to have adventures such as they were having now.

"*Now* we can believe in everything," they thought.

"When we have finished exploring the bottom of the sea, we will go to Fairyland;" and happy little shivers of excitement ran down their backs, while lumps came into their throats, making them want to shout for joy.

As they peeped across at each other, they caught sight of Shella's little face.

Yes, she *had* a secret; they were sure of it!

Her eyes were sparkling; she had two pink patches on her cheeks, and her lips were tightly pressed together, as if she were trying not to say something. If *that* did not mean she had a secret, Paul and Ellie felt that they knew nothing at all.

It was quite easy to wait, because they were both so happy that they could go on for ever doing just what they *were* doing, knowing that something more happy still was coming in a moment.

So away they went,

> Down to the bottom of the deep-blue sea,
> Down to the caves where the merfolk be,

and with a soft little thud they landed on the sea-bed.

The children looked round. "We haven't been here before, have we?" they asked.

"No," Shella answered; and they saw the secret dancing in her eyes.

"What is it?" they cried together. "Shella, tell us."

The mermaid drew them close. "I've got a secret," she whispered.

"Yes, we know; we could see. What is it?"

She looked at them with big serious eyes. "How could you *see* my secret?" she said in a disappointed voice. "If you've *seen* it, you know it."

"Oh, no! Shella dear," Ellie said, hastening

to comfort her, "we couldn't see the *secret*. We could only see by your happy face that you have got one; and we've a little one, too."

"Oh, that's what you meant, is it? Well, listen! This is *my* secret. I have a special little friend, a merboy called Rocco; and he is very brave and strong, and he swims about a long, long way by himself, looking for wonderful things. Yesterday he went farther than he has ever been before; he went on and on and on, at the bottom of the sea, and then he found a more wonderful thing than has ever been found before. He has only told *me* about it; it's our very own wonderful secret, and we are going to share it with you, and take you to see what he has found! But what is *your* little one?"

"Well, ours is not exactly a *secret*," Ellie said. "Only we're not going home so early. We are going to stay until dinner-time to-morrow; we've wrapped the necklace up in soft white paper, and put it in Mother's drawer for a surprise for her."

"But won't your mother be unhappy, if you stay so long?" Shella asked.

"Mother and Dad are away," Paul said. "We've left a note to say that we shall be home for dinner; our maids will think that we have gone out to the wood, early in the morning, which we are allowed to do, and that we have taken something to eat. It will be quite all right;

Mother and Dad will be back to-night. We thought you would be very pleased to know this."

"I *am* very pleased," was Shella's reply. "Now wait till I fetch Rocco; he is near at hand. We are ever so far from the Shell Palace, and halfway towards the place where the *thing* is. Wait!"

She swam away, and in a moment was lost to sight. So the children sat down and hugged their knees, wondering happily what the secret could be.

Shella soon came back, bringing with her a jolly, slim, lively-looking little merboy. "This is Rocco," she said, "the great, exploring, wonder-finding Rocco."

Every one laughed; and Paul said, "Oh tush! tush!" feeling like Dad. But only Ellie saw the joke.

They started off together, swimming on and on and on. They passed over a great space of sea-bottom, where there were no rocks. The ground was flat; and when they put their feet down, it felt slippery, for it was all clay. Then they came to a part which was sand, and Rocco said, "We shan't be very long now."

"Is the secret big?" Ellie asked; and he answered, "Simply huge! All the people in the Shell Palace could get into it!"

Paul said "O——h!" in a low voice, and

thought he had guessed; but Ellie could never guess riddles and gave it up.

On and on and on! They began to go very slowly; they were nearly there.

And then they suddenly saw a monstrous dark thing straight in front of them. They began to rise in the water. Up! up! And then they stopped, swam forward a little, and landed on——

On the deck of a sunken ship! *That* was the secret! It was a thrilling time which followed. The great steamer had gone down, full of treasures, and the children hardly knew what to look at first. They felt very grand, explaining everything to Shella and Rocco. They dragged things out of boxes, and they pulled them off the shelves. They dressed up in hats and coats, and they cut with scissors.

They showed how landfolk went to bed, and how they sat down to eat with knife and fork. They brushed their hair and stuck pins into it. They sat in baths, and told what soap was used for. They opened bottles of lemonade, and tried to drink it; and they took biscuits, which tasted soft and nasty.

Then Shella and Ellie found jewel-boxes in the ladies' cabins; and they made themselves gay with bracelets, necklaces, and pendants, and put rings on every finger. When they had rummaged about until they were tired, they sat down to talk of what they would do next.

"It's our very own secret," said Rocco, "and we'd better make the best of it."

Ellie and Shella felt ever so smart in their finery, holding out their hands to admire the rings, and peeping in looking-glasses which they had found in the cabins, to see their jewellery in general.

"We must take something to every one in the Palace," they said. "All the maids and mothers can have pretty presents like these, and all the men and boys can have knives and things of that sort."

Rocco suddenly swished his tail from side to side very quickly, and then he dived over and over and over, and round and round and round; in fact, he made so much disturbance in the water that no one could sit still. Paul and Ellie flopped over, and Shella had to use her tail to keep herself from drifting away. At last she darted forward and caught hold of him.

"You silly boy," she said, laughing and trying to hold him, "what's it all about?"

Rocco stopped as suddenly as he had begun.

"I've got a *sea-top* idea!" he said. "We'll give a party, like they do on dry land, and we'll tell no one about the ship, but hide the presents until it is time to give them out. Oh! *won't* they be surprised? They'll think we've learned to walk on our tails, and have been home with Paul and Ellie."

"Lovely!" exclaimed Shella, delighted with the notion. "Let's arrange all about it."

The four made plans. There was not a great deal of time, and very soon they were at work; they packed the presents into the bags which they found on the ship, and then Rocco went on ahead to tell every one at the Palace to be ready for the party.

It was quite hard work carrying the heavy bags full of jewellery and other things, and the little journey was slow; when, at length, they were near to the Palace, they found Rocco waiting for then. He took them round to the back, and through a tiny opening into a quiet room.

"Everybody is getting ready for the party," he said, "and I've ordered heaps and heaps of sea-cakes, and promised to pay with a great treasure later. We will give one of the presents from the ship."

Shella began to comb her hair, and smooth her tail, while Ellie fastened her beads round her neck, and straightened her frock. Meantime, Paul watched; he had put on his old jersey, and now he wished that he had worn his best.

"You know the water did not harm it, last time," Ellie said crossly.

"No, not *last* time. But I didn't know there was going to be a party, and sea water does take the colour out."

"You're just too stupid for words," Ellie

said, "and never believe anything." But now they were ready to go into the great hall. "We'll have a treasure-hunt," Rocco said excitedly, "as Paul says they do among the landfolk. Every one must go outside, while we hide the presents."

When they came into the great hall, they found it full of merfolk ready for the fun. The babies all lay smiling in shells, in rows against the walls, while the mermothers swam about, chattering together. Ellie thought this very funny, and imagined her own mother, and aunts, taking their babies to parties, and putting them all against the walls while they danced.

As the merbabies were all smiling so happily, the little girl moved across to talk to them. She lifted one, very gently, from its shell, and kissed its chubby cheeks; then it smiled and caught hold of her beads. She would have loved to go on playing with it; but Rocco and the others were sending every one else out, so that they could get ready for the treasure-hunt.

"Come on, Ellie!" called out Paul impatiently. "*Do* leave that fat baby alone, and help hide."

"Let's put a present in every shell under the babies," Ellie said; and as the others thought it a good idea, all the babies, still smiling, were carefully lifted up, and a present hidden under each. When everything else was in its place, the merfolk were fetched back again.

And *then* the fun began! The darting to and

fro, the swishing of tails, the sound of voices, and the fun of it all were more than Paul and Ellie could ever have imagined. And when the first merlady, lifting up her baby to kiss it, found the first present, there was such a rush at the babies, and such a scramble to get them out of the shells, to look under them, that Ellie clasped her hands in fear lest something unfortunate should happen.

But merbabies take life more easily than land ones; and so none of them seemed to mind at all, but went on smiling quite cheerfully, while they were being bundled about. Ellie stepped over, and took her own special favourite from its shell.

"You perfect little darling," she whispered, "I'm going to carry you round with me." And, tucking its slippery little tail through her arm, she clasped it tightly to her.

As you can well imagine, there was tremendous excitement when, at last, all the treasures were found. Every one took it for granted that Paul and Ellie had brought them from their home, and they let the party go on without saying anything on this point.

"At the *very* end we'll let them know about the ship," said Rocco gleefully.

After the treasure-hunt other games followed, mergames and games of the land children all being played in the most oddly muddled way,

though all of them were very much enjoyed by the party. Then sea-cakes were eaten, and every one sat down tired, ready for old Nepin to tell them a story.

As once before, Paul and Ellie listened, with thrills of wonder and delight, to the marvellous tale which the old merman told. It was a tale which brought them the sound of beating, breaking waves and of howling winds, the sight of scudding clouds and of heavy seas. Then, soft and clear in a lull of the storm, they could hear the singing of soft, sweet mermaid-voices from the rocks.

Everything that Nepin told about they could see clearly, so perfect was he in the way to tell a story; and when he had finished and said, "Now then, little Cinderella, your turn next," Ellie stepped forward, sat on a shell, and, with a little sigh of fear that she might not be able to do well, began the tale of Jack and the Beanstalk.

Perhaps grown-up merfolk are as easily pleased as merbabies; anyway Ellie felt that they must be, for every one was delighted with her story, and at the end there was a great swishing of tails, which was their way of clapping, to show how pleased they were.

The night was far on, but neither of the children felt at all homesick; and when the other people prepared to sleep a little while

before day broke, they felt quite ready to do so too.

Sleeping is a simple matter at the bottom of the sea. No one takes long about it, and no one goes to bed. In a few minutes the hall was covered with merfolk, curled up, lying flat, or sitting leaning against the walls, all with their eyes tightly shut and fast asleep.

Paul and Ellie lay down and closed their eyes.

"When we all wake up," Rocco said sleepily, "we'll take them to see our ship."

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGE MONSTERS.

Paul and Ellie woke up, sat up, stood up, and then they were ready to begin a new day!

"I wish it was as simple as this at home," Paul said. "Think what a lot of time we'd save."

Ellie thought so too; but she did not say so, because, when she *was* at home, it was different, and it was not considered very nice to like to get up without washing, or brushing your teeth.

"All the same, it's very nice for a *change*," she thought, and watched the merfolk already moving about the great hall.

Suddenly there was excitement everywhere! Rocco was telling them about his secret.

"Let's go and see it," was shouted. "Let's go and see it," rang out yet again; and there was a great move towards the main opening.

Rocco, Shella, and the children led the way; and very grand and important they felt, with all the older people following under their guidance.

As they passed through the water, they caught a glimpse of the old conger eel stealing along outside the crowd; but they knew that he durst not come near with so many about. So they just waved their hands, and laughed at him every time he passed.

On they went over the soft, flat sea-bottom, towards their find, with fifty curious merfolk following behind them.

"We're nearly there," Rocco called out cheerily, and every one pressed eagerly forward. A few minutes more, and the great black bulk loomed up in front of them. All the merfolk rose, as their leaders did; and, swimming forward, they landed on the ship.

A ship! Built on the dry land—once lived in by dry-land people, and still full of dry-land things, which they had never seen before, and which only Paul and Ellie could explain to them!

A ship! With beds, baths, cabins, tables, chairs, cups, knives, dresses, hats, umbrellas, scissors, needles, thread, mirrors, bottles, basins, carpets, and a hundred other articles of unknown uses.

How they darted about! How they explored, poked, peeped, tried on, lifted, dropped, picked up, put down! How they chattered and laughed and made a to-do!

Meantime, how little they guessed that, in the sea above them, were two terrible monsters, slowly, surely, preparing to descend upon them!

Ah! only the ill-natured conger noticed these; and he, as he circled round and round, never gave them a word of warning, as he might easily have done.

Yes, how little they knew what was near them, and how terrifying it was, when, all at once, a shrill scream was heard! One of the most timid of the merladies had happened to look up, and she saw great dark forms slowly growing bigger.

"Oh! look, *look*, ***look***!" she shrieked. "What are they? Oh! ***what*** are they?" And, as she pointed upwards, every eye was raised, and every one saw the awful monsters approaching.

But to get away was not so easy as it seemed. How could *one* go without all? Some were on deck, and others in the saloon; some were in cabins, and others in the hold.

And nearer, nearer, slowly, surely, the monsters above descended!

But to swim round, warning of danger, calling for help, and collecting companions, was the work of all who were aware of what threatened

them; and the ship was immediately the scene of confusion and terror.

"Unknown monsters are upon us!" was shrieked and shouted, and a stream of frightened merfolk poured up the stairways on to the deck, to see—to see with eyes of horror—two hideous forms coming through the water straight upon them.

Down, down, down!

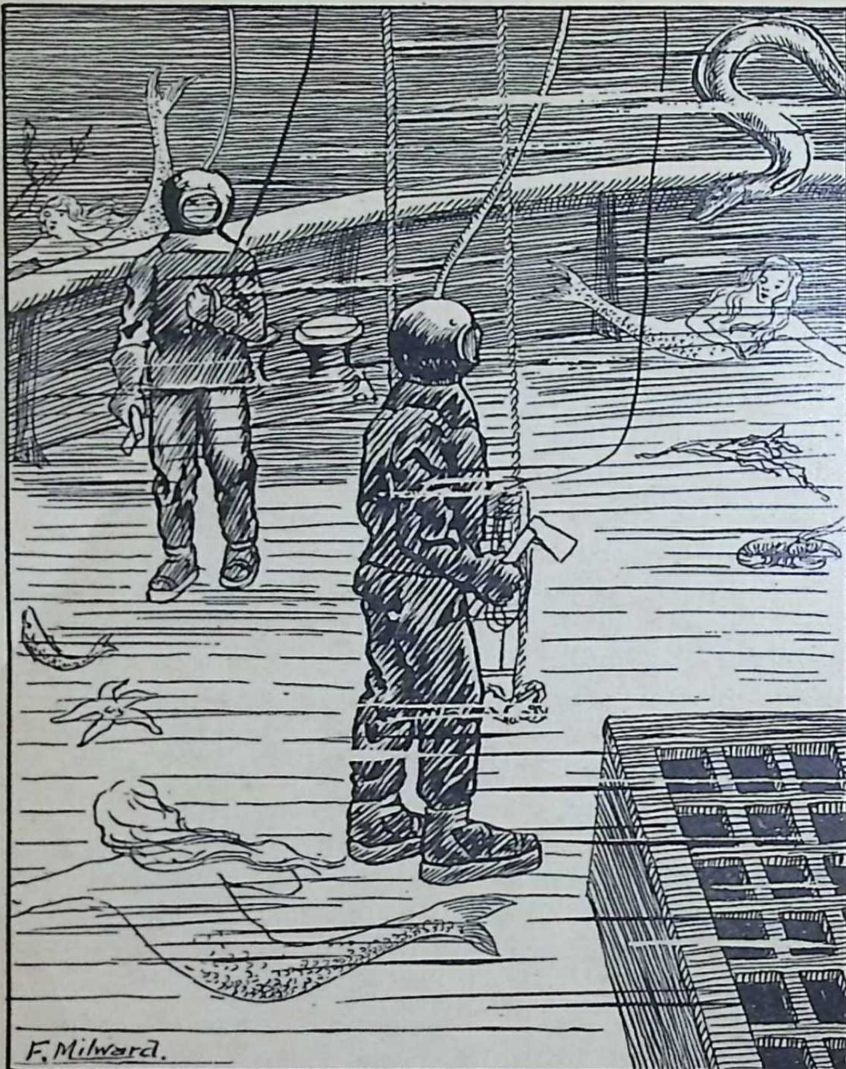
Slowly and clumsily they landed on the ship; and a crowd of merfolk, in the midst of whom were Paul and Ellie, lingered a little way off and watched them.

What were these? Landfolk? No! Sea creatures? No! Fairy people? Never!

The eyes of the many watchers grew bigger and bigger, as they saw the monsters moving slowly and heavily about the deck. These strange creatures were peering through great ugly eyes, as if it were hard for them to see, and were lifting up various things which had been left about, and looking at them.

After a little while, they moved to one of the stairways; and the merfolk, now feeling a little safer (for surely, they thought, they had not been seen), pressed nearer.

They saw the strangers walk slowly downstairs; and, as they crowded closer, growing bolder since nothing happened to them, they watched these unwelcome visitors searching, as



"They landed on the ship."—*Page* 37.

quickly as their size and clumsiness allowed, in the cabins and state-rooms of the steamer.

"What do the monsters want?" they whispered to one another. "Why are they searching the ship? Where do such people live? Why have they come here?" And, as they crowded round, no one noticed that Paul and Ellie had slipped away by themselves. They saw the unknown creatures come up from below, carrying small cases and boxes in their hands; and, having laid them upon the deck, they cut some rope and tied them together.

Nearer and nearer pressed the merfolk, eagerly watching, until, all at once, they found something still more unusual at which to stare!

What were these, stealing quietly up behind them? In a moment every eye was on them.

More monsters? No! But certainly something never seen before. It was Rocco who, darting forward, and peering closely at what seemed to be two huge bunches of seaweed, was able to explain the mystery.

"Why, it's Paul and Ellie," he cried, "all dressed up with water plants. But *why*," he went on, "Paul and Ellie, *why* have you done this? Are you going to try and frighten the monsters? Can you tell us why they are here?"

Every one gathered round the queer-looking children; and Paul, moving a little of the seaweed from his face, said,

"Those are divers. They have come, I think, to get the jewellery, and other valuable things, which the passengers left on the ship. They are men from Dryland, and they cannot breathe under water; so they have long pipes to bring air down to them. They walk clumsily, because they have heavy weights on their feet, to keep them down. They will not hurt you. Ellie and I have never seen them before, but we have heard about them."

"But why have you put seaweed all over you?" asked Rocco.

"Well, we hope you won't mind our going home now," Ellie said; "but Paul and I, specially Paul, are very interested in divers, and we thought we'd cling on to them, and get taken up into the boat, and it would be very exciting, and a great adventure. The divers can't see very well through their glasses; and we hope we can creep into the boat, when they ar'n't looking, and if they *do* see us, when we're there, they will only think we've been hiding in the boat all the time, because they'd never believe that we'd been in Merland and come up out of the water."

Rocco and his friends looked serious.

"It sounds very dangerous," said one of them.

"What's dangerous?" asked Ellie anxiously.

"To go with the monsters; they might hurt you."

"But they ar'n't monsters," Ellie cried eagerly. "When they get these funny clothes off, they are men, like our father."

Shella pushed herself up to the front of the crowd.

"And you'll come again, won't you?" she asked. "And then you can tell us all that has happened."

"Oh yes! We'll come again; and you will be there to meet us, won't you, Shella dear?"

There was a sudden movement in the crowd. The divers were preparing to go up again. They saw them busy with the ropes and tubes which went up into the dim water above.

"They are giving the signal to be pulled up," Paul said, and he and Ellie whispered last good-byes; but Ellie darted forward and kissed her baby, before she followed Paul.

"Good-bye, good-bye," they said. Then they moved through the water; and, as the divers began to be drawn slowly up, the children took hold of the cord round the cases and rose too, for the magic of Merland was with them so long as they were in the sea. As they went up, they waved their hands to the crowd watching them so eagerly from below.

In spite of all they had said, their friends the merfolk were still afraid of the monsters, and only Rocco, who was held back by old Nepin, had any desire to follow them.

Up! Up! Up! Once more up through the cool, green water. And this time the greenness was brighter and different, for it was day above. Up they went, clinging with happy excitement to the divers' treasure.

They were not near enough to talk, for Paul's diver had started before Ellie's; but they could keep each other in sight, and the journey was not as long as it had been, when they had gone down, in a deeper part of the sea, to the Shell Palace.

Up they went slowly, and soon they knew that they must be near the top.

What would happen? Would they be able to slip into the boat without being seen? How were they going to manage? These and many more questions they asked themselves, as they went up. And then, before any single one had been answered, the top *was* reached, the divers had their heads out of the water, and strong men reached over the side of the waiting boat, to help them in.

Paul and Ellie came close together for a moment.

"Careful!" Paul whispered. "Don't let the seaweed fall off your face. Just cling on, and then roll into the boat."

It sounded quite easy, and Ellie was just saying to herself, "I know Paul will be able to do it all right, but I shall go and make a mess

of it," when the divers climbed up out of the water, and the great moment had arrived.

And it was all just as she had *not* expected. As the cases were lifted over the side of the boat, she slipped with a soft little thud on to the bottom; then, peeping through the seaweed, and seeing all the men busy helping the divers, she crept away from them ever so quietly, and hid herself at the far end of the boat, under a pile of nets and ropes.

But Paul, Paul the clever—Paul, who had told her just how to do it—managed to roll into the boat so noisily that a big fisherman, hearing something move at his side, turned suddenly and saw him.

"Why, great Scott!" he exclaimed, "if there ain't a lad here;" and he pointed to Paul, who stood feeling very silly.

Every one stared at him, and then another man said, "Come out of the sea, haven't you, Tommy? Been down to say 'how-do' to the mermaids?"

Paul did not answer.

"What's your name?" some one asked.

"Paul Eardley."

"Live in the White House?"

"Yes."

"Well, you've no right to come sneaking into the boat, without asking. Get up there out of mischief. You made yourself scarce enough

on the out journey." And, with that, the men turned away to attend to the divers and their haul.

"There's a lot of stuff missing," the first one said. "We shall have to go down another day and search again."

The boat was turned towards the shore. Ellie put out a little hand and touched Paul, who then gave a great jump and only just stifled a scream. The sun shone down and warmed them, and all at once they knew that Merland was very far away.

"Come out now," Paul whispered. "It really doesn't matter." And as Ellie slipped up on to the seat by him, some one shouted,

"Why, bless me, if there ain't a little girl there now! Let 'em all come! Where's the baby, Sissy?"

The children sat silent, and soon the boat ran up to the landing-stage, where they contrived to slip away unnoticed.

Across the golden, sun-warmed sand!

Away on swift, light feet over the shore!

Away, away to the little green gate! They lifted the latch and slipped through into the garden.

Yes, Merland *is* a long, long way from houses.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORM.

The wind howled round the White House.

Great clouds scudded across the moon, and the windows rattled with sudden loud shakes, which made you afraid that they would blow in.

Paul and Ellie sat on the window-seat, peering through the glass.

"We'll have to go, anyway," Paul said. "We *must* tell them what Dad says about the treasure. You see it *is* our fault; if we had left all the jewellery in the boxes, the divers would have found it quite easily, and then they would not have had to go and search again. And if they go this time and can't find it in the ship, they'll perhaps go to the Shell Palace; and oh! Ellie, they mustn't do that."

"No, they *mustn't* do that," Ellie agreed. "We will go and warn the merfolk, and they must put everything back again." She jumped up. "Let's put on our things; by the time we get to the waves, Shella should be there, but I don't know how she will manage with such a big sea."

The children put on coats and hats. It was not cold, but very, very windy. Ellie plaited her hair back tightly, and tucked the shorter ends firmly behind her ears.

They stole slowly downstairs and opened the

side door. The wind howled and moaned, and they pulled the handle quickly, so that the noise should not wake their parents.

The little gate, grey again in the gleam of the moonlight between passing clouds, blew to with a bang behind them, and they crossed the sand banks on to the shore.

Hand in hand, with heads bent, and bodies leaning forward, the children pushed their way onwards. Over the drifting sands, which blew sharp and stinging across their faces, towards the beating, crashing waves, which they could now see dimly in front of them.

"Shella will *never* come," Ellie called out to Paul; and a moment or two later they were as near to the water as they dared go. Suddenly the moon shone clear, and the children jumped about on tiptoe, trying to see into the falling waves, and to peep over the highest of them in case the mermaid was just behind.

Nothing but black water and tossing foam was to be seen.

"She'll *never* come," Ellie cried again, but Paul did not answer. He was very determined; he had on his best jersey, for he had been thinking so earnestly about the jewels that he had forgotten to change it. They *must* be put back; at all costs they must go again into the ship, so that the divers should not try to find them in the Shell Palace.

Catching hold of Ellie's hand, he took her a little way beside the waves, and gave no heed, when she said, once again, in rather a pitiful little voice, "She'll *never* come, Paul."

They had walked back again to the place that they first came to, and were just standing on tiptoe, eagerly watching, when there—as once before—*there*, just in front of them, on the crest of a falling wave, they saw what they were so much hoping to see.

But this time the little mermaid did not beckon to them, or smile. She spread out her little white arms over the surging water, and shook her head from side to side. Then a big cloud sailed over the moon, and it was dark again.

"What does she mean?" Ellie asked eagerly.

"I don't *quite* know," Paul said doubtfully. "But don't you think that she can't take us down to-night? You see *she* doesn't know that we've anything special to tell her."

"We arranged to tell her all about our adventures in the boat," was Ellie's reply.

"Yes, that can be told any time; but she doesn't know that we *must* tell her about the jewels to-night."

"But, Paul, perhaps we can't."

"We must. I shall, somehow; I shall try to get near her. I've *got* to tell her about the pearl necklace."

Then Ellie became really frightened.

"But, Paul, you *can't*," she exclaimed.

"I shall."

"But you just can't; it's too dangerous. If you don't find Shella, you'll be drowned. Oh! Paul, you can't; and—and—besides," she went on miserably, "you've got on your best jersey, and you'll spoil it."

"I forgot to change it, but I can't help it; I *must* speak to Shella," insisted Paul.

They waited again; and then once more, this time for a little longer, the moon sailed clear of the clouds.

"There she is, there she is," Ellie cried, jumping about in her excitement, and clinging to Paul, lest he should try to go into the surging water.

This time the mermaid was a little nearer, but she still spread out her arms and shook her head. Paul began to shout to her about the jewels; and, though there was too much noise for her to hear what he was saying, they could see that she knew that it was something very important. Instead of shaking her head this time, she pointed towards the rocks which jutted out into the sea, some little distance away.

"She wants us to go to the rocks," Ellie cried. "She can't get to us here, but perhaps it will be quieter there. In the cove it won't be so noisy; perhaps she wants us to go there."

Paul guessed that this was what Shella meant; so he took hold of Ellie's hand, and they set off, once more, across the wind-swept sands. The gale was at their backs now, and it fairly blew them along over to the rocks. It was much darker, and they found their way mainly by the sound of the falling waves; but when they reached the rocks, the moon kindly shone again.

They clambered over the rocks, which were well known to them, and came at last to a little deep-set cove, where there were no beating and pounding waves and the wind forgot to blow. There, as they had hoped, they found Shella sitting on a flat slab of rock, with her tail hanging down into the black water.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "What storms you do have up here!"

Paul did not give himself time for a polite answer; he began at once to tell about the divers, and how they were coming down again, the next day, he thought, to search for the missing jewels. And then he told her what he had heard Father say about a beautiful pearl necklace which could not be found. It belonged to a lady whose husband had died in America, and she had come back to England, which was her home, and was going to sell it, because she needed the money.

It took a little time to make Shella understand all this; but at last Paul thought that he

had made things fairly clear, and Ellie added her bit by saying, "And the lady's got the *dearest* little baby, Shella, and I expect she wants to buy it a pram," which obliged Paul, of course, to explain what a "pram" was.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she said, wringing her hands. "Why, the pearl necklace is quite lost. I remember all about it. Rocco went back on the boat, after all the other people had gone to the Palace, and he found it under the pillow of one of the beds. He was taking it home to give to his mother, when that conger eel chased him; so he dropped it, and didn't dare stay to pick it up again. He told me all about it, and we went to look for it afterwards; but we couldn't find it."

"I guess the conger's got it," Paul said angrily.

Shella nodded. "I do, too," she said. "But what shall we do?"

"Why did you keep on shaking your head, when you were on the waves just now?" Ellie asked suddenly.

"To tell you that you had better not come to-night."

"But why?"

"Because of the storm. It will grow a great deal worse, and I should not get you back on to the sands again."

"Well, I think we *must* go down," Paul said, "and help to look for the pearl necklace."

"No! No!" Shella's little voice rang out quite clearly. "I cannot take you to Merland to-night. The storm will be very cruel later, and we shall stay at the bottom of the sea, where it cannot reach us. You know I may take you down a few times; that is a special favour which has been granted to me by our Queen. But I must not take you to-night; that would not please her. You can see me now, because that is allowed, too; but, later on, I shall often be on the waves, looking at you, and you will not be able to see me any more than you could before."

Ellie rubbed her eyes. "Sometimes I think I am only dreaming it all over," she said; and Shella answered, "Oh, no! It is real *now*."

"Well, what are we to do about the necklace?" Paul asked. The storm was growing louder. The black water in the cove rose and fell with the force of the outside waves, and stray gusts of wind blew coldly in on them.

"I must go down," Shella said, "and you must go through the little gate to your home. To-morrow night, when all is quiet again, I will take you down, and we will tell you if we have found the necklace."

"You *must* find it," Paul said in a decided tone. "Can't you get your Queen to help you?"

Shella smiled; and once again the look in her eyes, for the moon was filling the little cove once more, made him feel foolish.

Without a word the little mermaid slipped off the rock, and into the water, now silvered with moonlight; and with a swish of her tail she disappeared.

Paul and Ellie scrambled over the rocks. The gale had turned into a hurricane. They could hardly stand. Great waves rose and fell with crashes of thunder. The children could not hear each other speak, and they clung together.

Fighting for all they were worth, they made their way slowly over the sands. For a moment it was almost as bright as day, and then clouds covered the moon, and all was black darkness. The wind stung their faces, and forced tears out of their eyes, and down their cheeks.

Paul pulled Ellie along as best he could, but it was slow, hard work; and home and their warm beds seemed very far away.

Ellie was glad that Shella had not taken them down to Merland, for she knew that they could never have come through the great waves safely. Then she thought of the little gate, and pushed harder against the wind, because a warm feeling of home had crept into her heart.

"We'll soon be there," Paul yelled; but she could only guess what he was saying. Then, just as they were bracing themselves up for another great struggle, the little green gate was in front of them!

Paul held it open, while Ellie slipped through.

Up the garden path, under swaying trees, to the porch at the side door!

Through the door, and into the quiet house!

At last! They stole softly upstairs.

Ellie put her arms round Paul's neck and kissed him.

"I *love* Merland," she whispered, "but I'm glad we're here now, ar'n't you?"

Paul stood stiff until she had hugged him.

"Um —— yes," he answered. "But we *must* find that necklace to-morrow."

"Oh, yes! We *will* to-morrow," Ellie answered softly. "Good-night, Paulie." She was in her room.

"Good-night," Paul replied as softly. He was in his.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NECKLACE FOUND.

To go to Merland on the night after the storm, was quite an easy matter. Everything happened exactly as it had done before, and Paul remembered to put on his old jersey.

When they reached the bottom, they were taken by Shella straight to the Shell Palace. And there Rocco, the playful Rocco, who was waiting for them, had such a long face that both Paul and Ellie laughed, when they saw him.

"Oh! don't look like that, Rocco," exclaimed Ellie.

"But it was I who lost it," the merboy answered miserably.

"Yes, but perhaps it will be you who'll find it again," Paul said.

"No, it won't," was Rocco's reply. "We'll never find it; that conger has put it somewhere, I'm sure. We've been searching ever since Shella came back and told us about it, and no one can find it."

"Well, let *us* look," Ellie said. "I'm *very* good at finding Mother's glasses."

"If *we* can't find it, I'm sure you can't," Shella said; and Ellie and Paul felt at once that this was true.

"Well, what shall we do then?" Paul asked.

Shella said, "We'd better tell old Nepin about it; he is wiser than anyone else. I asked my mother, and she only said, 'I don't know, I'm sure, what ever you *can* do.'"

"And my mother said just the same," Rocco joined in. "Let's go to Nepin."

Paul and Ellie cheered up at the thought of going to the old merman. How clever he had been, when they had gone to him before! How he had known just when Ellie was beginning to be homesick, and how wonderfully he had spoken of the little green gate and home! Yes, Nepin

was the one to whom they must go. How ever had they been so slow in knowing it?

They set off at once. The old man had his house in a rather lonely part, never staying long in the Palace, Shella said, and spending a great deal of his time alone.

"It is about halfway between here and the Blue Caves," remarked Rocco; and, taking hold of hands, the four set off through the water.

Paul and Ellie were in the middle, and the merboy and mermaid on either side of them. They swam hard and steadily, going along at a good speed. No one spoke, for the work in hand was important; but all at once, with a loud scream, Shella swished round and began pulling in the opposite direction.

Rocco at once saw why; but, for a moment, the children did not know what had happened.

First Ellie, and then Paul, saw their danger. The conger eel! Hissing as usual, grinning as usual, uglier than ever!

The next minute, the four were tearing along in front of him as hard as they could go. But not towards the little house of old Nepin. In their fright they had turned another way.

Paul felt fearfully angry. Had he not driven this enemy off once before? Yes, but then he had the opening of a cave behind, and the cave was big enough to hold him, but too small for the great conger.

He ground his teeth with anger. Yes, there *had* been a cave; but he had not known it, when first he faced round upon the foe.

With a great jerk he pulled his hands away from Ellie and Shella; and, in a voice which sounded braver than he really felt, he shouted, "Stop running away from an eel!" With that, he turned round, pulling out his knife once more.

With a flick of his tail Rocco was at his side, holding a little piece of shell which Nepin had sharpened to a point.

And, in all the history of the merfolk of the Shell Palace, never before had there been such a terrible fight as was now fought between the conger eel and Paul.

Ellie and Shella were obliged to keep a long way off, for the twisting and turning, and coming and going, of the two at battle, made it quite impossible for them to be near without being hurt.

Paul fought for all he was worth. Every time the furious fish came within reach, he dug at him fiercely with his knife; and slowly and surely, in spite of various bites on his hands and arms, he got the better of his enemy.

For the bad-tempered conger was a poor fighter. When he was very angry, he became stupid; and as he got angrier, he became more and more stupid.

He plunged wildly at Paul without waiting

for his chance to attack with advantage; and hardly ever did he draw off again without a good sharp cut somewhere upon him. With all his might, Paul stabbed and stabbed, until his arms, as well as his eyes, and legs also, ached terribly.

Angrier and angrier grew the great conger, and fiercer and fiercer the little boy. Around and around they went, the fish hissing and the boy shouting—the fish stupidly plunging at him headforemost, and Paul seizing every chance and cutting viciously.

But the deadliest battle must end at last, and even at the bottom of the sea victory comes in time. The conger hissed his last hiss, made his last plunge, got his last stab, and rolled over on his side, dead.

Paul sat down and rested his head on his knees. He had slashed so violently at the great fish that he had really almost cut him in two, and he was so tired that he could not stand up another minute.

But, tired out though he was, he sprang to his feet at a loud call from Ellie, and Shella, and Rocco.

"Come, come, come!" they cried together; then Shella swam hurriedly to him, and drew him across to where the other two were eagerly bending over the dead conger.

"Look, LOOK!" they cried, pointing to

where the fish was slashed open. "Look, LOOK, Paul! Do you see what that is? It's the pearl necklace; he'd swallowed it, and it's there now. Look!"

But by this time Rocco had caught hold of the end of the necklace and drawn it out. The four bent over it eagerly. Yes, it was the lost necklace, and no worse for its adventure. Every one now cheered up and chatted gaily.

"*Now* we've got it."

"We needn't search any more."

"We'll take it to the Palace and show every one."

"And the lady will have it again, and sell it to buy a pram," Ellie finished up.

"But you don't know that she wants a pram," Paul began, and Ellie, who saw signs of a little quarrel coming on, quickly rejoined,

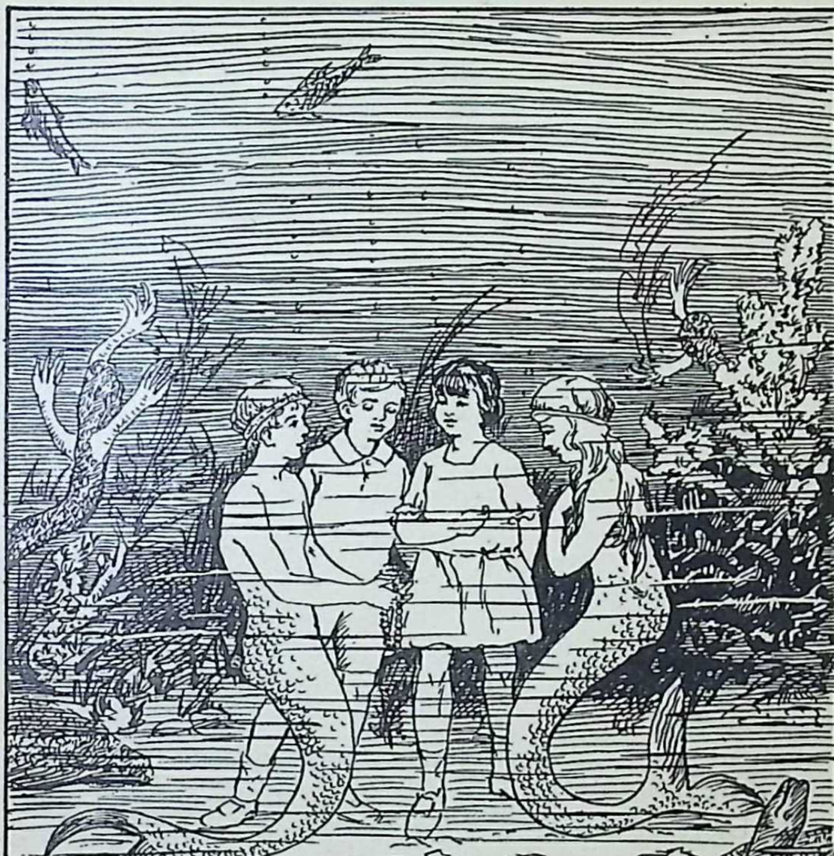
"It doesn't matter anyway. Come along all of you, and back we go."

And back they went, in the highest spirits, and carrying the necklace in triumph.

"Here it is, here it is!" they shouted, gliding in through the Palace entrance, and holding the necklace up for every one to see.

A crowd gathered round; and Shella and Rocco saw their mothers pushing their way quickly forward, each with something in her hand.

"But see here!" they said. "We have been to the oysters, and begged more pearls for you.



"It was the lost necklace."—*Page* 58.

Nepin has put holes in them, and they are *very* beautiful."

"I've got a good idea," cried Ellie. "Let's add those pearls to the necklace, and it will make it ever so much more beautiful, and worth a lot more money to the lady."

Every one was delighted, and there followed a happy bustling time. They re-threaded the necklace, adding all the most beautiful of the pearls which the mothers had brought. When it was finished, it was truly a lovely thing, and much admired by all in the Palace.

"Now we must go and put this and the other presents back in the ship," Nepin said; and every one trooped out and away over the smooth sea-bottom to the sunken vessel.

The jewellery was put in a little pile on the deck, and as the mermaids and merladies took off their rings and chains, they gave each little trinket a kiss.

"Every one who wears them after this," they said, "will have good luck. That is what we can send them from Merland."

The children put the things away in a strong chest; after which the merfolk trooped off and left them.

The four looked at one another. Ellie saw that Paul was tired, and that he had marks on his hands and arms, where the conger had bitten him.

Paul looked at Ellie for some time, without speaking. "She doesn't like me to be hurt," he thought; "dear little silly!"

Still without a word, they moved quietly through the water, until they came to Nepin, whom they found sitting on a rock, all by himself. He looked up at them with far-away eyes; grey and blue and black they were—and as the children looked into them, they thought of waves, and spray, and wind-blown gulls. Then, as they looked deeper still, they felt the peace of quiet water and dim sea-light.

But he could see into their very hearts.

"Sing to us, Nepin," Shella cried, and there was a little catch in her voice. The children sat at the old man's feet, and he sang, in a low sweet voice, strange tales of Merland, of wild storms, of big black rocks, of calm moonlight seas, and of the far-away days when the world was young.

Ellie's eyes grew large and dreamy, and Paul swayed slowly to and fro to the music of the song.

Suddenly they looked up, their eyes fixed on the old man. What was that he was singing? Had they been sleeping? Had he sung it before? They leaned forward, listening to the dear voice—

"Far up above you, where the green waves fall,
Far up above you, where the seagulls call,
The little gate swings wide.

The sand hills finish where the tree-tops blow;
The little path leads, as the children know,
To banks where violets hide.

The lamp is lowered, and the curtains drawn;
The house is sleeping in the cold white dawn;
The grass is bright with dew.

Away, for the first pale gleams of the sun
Have shot through the sky, and the day's begun!
The gate swings wide for you;
The gate swings wide for you!"

Nepin sang no more. Paul and Ellie looked again into the far-away eyes. "And now we must go," Ellie said in a quiet little voice; and Shella nodded without speaking.

Day was breaking when the children crept silently up the path, under the trees, past the violet bank, to the quiet house. Golden windows told them that the sun had risen.

Presently, as they lay a-sleeping, beautiful sea-dreams came to them from far-away distances.

"It's a most remarkable thing," said Mr. Eardley, looking up from his newspaper one morning at breakfast.

"What is?" asked Mrs. Eardley.

"Why, that lost necklace has been recovered from the wreck," he said, "and the lady to whom it belongs, declares that it has twenty more pearls on it than before, bigger and finer than any of the others."

"Impossible!" Mother said.

"It can't be," continued Father, "unless, indeed, the mermaids have had a hand in it. In fact, I've never understood how the children found your birthday necklace." And his eyes twinkled, as he glanced round the table.

Paul and Ellie looked at each other without speaking.

THE SONG OF THE SHELL.

Oh! the song of the shell,
I love it full well;
It tells of the murmuring sea.
When close to my ear,
It carols so clear
Of wavelets all dancing in glee.

It tells of the ships,
And the sea-gull that dips
In waters so sparkling and blue;
Of the mermaids that sleep
In the caves of the deep,
Of fishes and coral reefs, too.

Oh! the song of the shell,
I love it full well;
Its murmur is sweet as can be,
For it breathes of the love
Of the Father above,
Who made both the earth and the sea.

Marian Isabel Hurrell.

QUESTIONS.

Chapter I.

1.—Tell me how Paul and Ellie arrived in Merland.

2.—Describe shortly the Shell Palace and the merfolk who lived there.

3.—How did Paul and Ellie obtain the pearls for their mother's necklace?

Chapter II.

1.—What happened when the children and Shella were chased by the conger eel?

2.—How did the children satisfy their hunger, and how did they pay for what they had to eat?

3.—Say what you can about the picture opposite page 23.

Chapter III.

1.—Who was Rocco, and what was his great secret?

2.—Imagine yourself to have been with Paul and Ellie, and describe the party in the Shell Palace.

3.—What have you read, so far, about Nepin?

Chapter IV.

1.—What do you know about divers? Why had they come to the ship?

2.—How did Paul and Ellie return to their home after their second visit to Merland?

Chapter V.

1.—Why were Paul and Ellie so anxious to speak to Shella on the night of the storm?

2.—Tell me what the children knew about the pearl necklace.

Chapter VI.

1.—Where did the children find the necklace?

2.—What did the merfolk do with the jewell[illegible], which they had taken from the deck?

3.—How was it that the pearl necklace had more pearls on it when recovered from the wreck, than it had had [illegible]ore?

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